

CLAIMS:

1 1. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities forming a community, comprising:
3 a hub comprising at least one server providing standard message formats and an open
4 integration architecture, network servicing component; and
5 a plurality of entities, wherein each entity desires interaction with at least one other
6 entity, and each entity is connected to the hub via a pathway using the hub's standard message
7 formats and open integration architecture, wherein the hub facilitates interaction and establishes
8 links between and among the plurality of entities.

1 2. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities, as recited in claim 1, wherein the standard message formats used by the hub and the
3 plurality of entities are coded in Extensible Mark-up Language (XML).

1 3. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities, as recited in claim 1, wherein an entity is selected from the group consisting of a
3 company, a customer, a supplier, a partner, a hub provider, a service provider, and a vertical
4 market portal.

1 4. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities, as recited in claim 3, wherein the plurality of entities connected to the hub form an
3 integration between and among vertical markets sites relevant to a particular industry.

1 5. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities, as recited in claim 1, wherein at least one entity connected to the hub is also connected
3 to at least one additional entity, the additional entity being connected to the hub, thereby adding
4 an additional level of connectivity in the community.

1 6. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities, as recited in claim 1, wherein the community is implemented on a proprietary intranet.

1 7. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities as recited in claim 1, wherein the community is implemented on a public, global
3 computer network.

1 8. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities, as recited in claim 1, wherein the hub is provided by an entity in the community.

1 9. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among companies and
2 service providers, as recited in claim 8, wherein the hub providing entity collects a fee for hub
3 usage by other members of the community.

1 10. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities, as recited in claim 1, wherein at least one entity in the community entity is a service
3 provider selected from the group consisting of a financial service provider, a logistics service

4 provider, a procurement service provider, a health, safety and environmental service provider, an
5 e-commerce engine service provider, and a spot market service provider.

1 11. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities, as recited in claim 10, wherein services provided by a financial services provider
3 comprise providing financial information, performing credit checks, and related services.

1 12. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities, as recited in claim 10, wherein services provided by logistics and/or procurement service
3 providers comprise transportation and shipping services, and inventory tracking services.

1 13. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities, as recited in claim 10, wherein services provided by health, safety and environmental
3 (HSE) service providers comprise providing regulatory information relating to federal, state and
4 international regulations.

1 14. A system for facilitating and managing relationships between and among companies and
2 service providers, as recited in claim 1, wherein an entity in the community is a service provider
3 capable of being automated or codified in computer software.

1 15. A method for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities forming a community, comprising:

3 establishing a hub for integrating entities within the community, the hub having one or
4 more servers providing standard message formats and an open integration architecture, and
5 network servicing component;

6 integrating a plurality of entities with the hub via a plurality of pathways using the hub's
7 standard message formats and open integration architecture, wherein each entity desires
8 interaction with at least one other entity and communicates with other entities in the community
9 through the hub.

1 16. A method for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities forming a community, as recited in claim 15, further comprising:

3 enabling an entity in the community to form a pathway directly to a second entity in the
4 community using the standard message formats used by the hub.

1 17. A method for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities forming a community, as recited in claim 16, further comprising:

3 providing, by a service provider, services to one or more entities within the community,
4 wherein the service provider and a service receiver are connected directly.

1 18. A method for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
2 entities forming a community, as recited in claim 16, further comprising:

3 providing, by a service provider, services to one or more entities within the community,
4 wherein the service provider and a service receiver are connected through the hub.

- 1 19. A method for facilitating and managing relationships between and among business
- 2 entities forming a community, as recited in claim 16, wherein at least one entity in the
- 3 community is a service provider.